



FEMA

Joint Information Center Disaster News



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FLOODWATERS CARRY CONTAMINANTS; BE CAREFUL CLEANING UP

BALTIMORE — As people start cleaning up the mess left by Hurricane Isabel, emergency officials urge them to take extra precautions to protect their own health and safety. Health officials recommend that anyone who has suffered any kind of wound while cleaning up storm damage consider contacting his or her health care provider. Tetanus shots are good for up to ten years.

Renters and homeowners should assume that anything touched by floodwater is contaminated and will have to be disinfected or thrown away. Mud left by floodwater may contain chemicals from sources as varied as your garden chemicals to a neighbor's septic tank to the oven cleaner you stored in the kitchen. It is important to clean everything touched by floodwaters as quickly as possible.

Don't let floodwater sit for long. Use a mop, squeegee, or wet/dry vacuum cleaner to remove standing water. Remove as much mud as possible. Plan to disinfect the basement at a later date. Once you've checked the water system for leaks, hose down the inside of the house and its contents. It's best to use an attachment that sprays soap to wash and rinse the walls, floors, furniture, sockets, electrical boxes and other major items that got muddy.

Flood victims should separate out flood damaged chemical wastes and not dispose of them with other waste materials. Improper disposal may further threaten the quality of drinking water supplies. Products that should be set aside from other debris for proper disposal include waxes and polishes, caustic cleaners, fertilizers, oils, pesticides and aerosols.

Wear rubber boots and waterproof gloves during cleanup. Always wash your hands with soap and clean water after working in the area.

Clean all walls, hard-surface floors and other household surfaces with soap and water and disinfect them with a solution of one cup of bleach to five gallons of water. Pay particular attention to areas that come in contact with food, or where small children play. After cleaning a room or item, go over it again with disinfectant to kill germs and odors left by floodwaters.

Caution: When using household cleaners, disinfectants and bleach, always follow directions. Be sure to read the labels and be aware of any caution or danger warnings. Never mix household bleach with other cleaning agents.

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Use a two-bucket method when cleaning. Put cleaning solution in one bucket and rinse water in the other. Replace rinse water frequently.

Remove and discard contaminated household goods such as wall coverings, rugs, cloth and drywall that can't be disinfected. When in doubt, throw it out.

Remove mildew with household mildew cleaner; a mixture of five tablespoons washing soda or trisodium phosphate to a gallon of water or 1/4 cup of laundry bleach to a gallon of water.

Empty standing water out of birdbaths, tires, flowerpots and other containers.

If the pilot light on your natural gas furnace, hot-water heater or stove goes out, have it re-lit by a professional.

For more information, a joint publication of the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross is available. For a free copy of "Repairing Your Flooded Home," write FEMA Publications, P.O. Box 70274, Washington, DC 20024, or call 1-800-480-2520.

All homeowners, renters and business owners affected by the Hurricane are urged to call the toll-free registration number, 1-800-621-FEMA (3362), to apply for assistance. People with hearing or speech impairments can call (TTY) 1-800-462-7585 for assistance. Applications can be made between 7 a.m. and midnight daily until further notice.

On March 1, 2003, FEMA became part of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. FEMA's continuing mission within the new department is to lead the effort to prepare the nation for all hazards and effectively manage federal response and recovery efforts following any national incident. FEMA also initiates proactive mitigation activities, trains first responders, and manages Citizen Corps, the National Flood Insurance Program and the U.S. Fire Administration.

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